

182 • FRIEND AND FOX (1600-1928)

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[199] Thus Cooper with his well-armed retinue of mainlanders had made the islands safe for white men and introduced a desire for white men's goods, particularly tobacco. His retirement from Melville Island left the newly established Mission on Bathurst Island as the only source of supply for these goods. After World War I, however, another influence began to grow in importance. Large numbers of Japanese pearling boats came and anchored off the coasts of southern and southeastern Melville Island, where they traded with the local bands—the Yeimpi and Mandiimbula. These bands got tobacco and European-type food (flour, rice, tea, sugar) from the Japanese in quantities which the Catholic missionaries could not afford to provide; all the Japanese asked in return was access to young native women. Men who controlled many women—as fathers, as husbands, or as brothers—were thus in a favorable position to profit by the traffic with the Japanese.

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197 Whereas the demands made by the Japanese on the Yeimpi and Mandiimbula for women were quite straightforward and uncomplicated, Father Gsell's demands on the bands of south Bathurst Island were somewhat more complex in their consequences. Many aspects of the old pattern of Tiwi life had to be abandoned to make them into Christians. To the missionaries, polygamy was sinful and could not be part of the new Tiwi life. Prenatal and infant bestowal had to be abolished. Marriages should be between agemates and should be arranged freely and solely by the couple involved. Such changes were the crux of Father Gsell's program, and the story of how he went about it has run in many a Sunday supplement in the cities of Australia under the title "The Bishop With 150 Wives."⁸ Father Gsell did not try to convert or drastically change the behavior of the older Tiwi; he believed that they were too set in their ways. Rather, he built toward a distant day by working among the younger generation. When infant girls became widows, he purchased them from their fathers. Men with young widowed daughters and those with spare young wives sold such girls for axes, flour, tobacco, cloth, and trinkets. Such "Blackies," as they became affectionately called,⁹ lived in the convent with the French (and later Australian) sisters. When such a girl reached the age of about 18, she was asked to choose one of the young single men for her husband. For his part in this excellent deal which provided him with a wife long before he would get one under the old tribal system, the young man had only to promise that he would never take another wife. Such a wedding was not a Mass, for neither party was Catholic. However, the children born of this new union were baptized and reared as Catholics. Later, a few of the girls who had been sold to Father Gsell before they were ten went through confirmation as did their youthful fiancés. The first nuptial Mass between two such Tiwi took place in 1928.

⁸ Father Gsell became Bishop of Darwin in 1938. He lived on in retirement to 1958, having seen in his lifetime the fulfilment of his dream of the Tiwi as a Catholic tribe.

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551] ⁹ The Tiwi today strongly resent being called "African," "Negro," or "nigger," but they do not seem to mind being called "Blacks." The term "Blackie" for a young female is in general use by Mission school girls for themselves; it is in no sense derogatory.

THE BEGINNING OF FRIENDLY CONTACT (1900-1928) • 103

When between the mid-1920's and the early 1940's the Japanese began to give trade goods to men for sexual access to their wives, Father Gsell's missionization program ran into competition. The Japanese gave the old Tiwi males a much better deal than did Father Gsell. The Japanese with their continuous payment for access to women poured into the households of these old men the same sort of goods which Gsell provided. But in the case of the Japanese, the goods were paid time and again over a matter of years and the old father or husband was kept permanently in tobacco and food. Thus, oddly indeed, the two chief outside influences which came to bear upon the traditional Tiwi system of marriage, after about 1920, were both agencies which were anxious (for entirely different reasons and ends) to "buy" young girls and pay their ancient husbands or fathers for relinquishing them; temporarily in the case of the Japanese, permanently in the case of the missionaries. The Tiwi could scarcely be expected to cease putting a high value on women, and upon control over women, under these conditions.

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The Tiwi Today

Changes since 1930

THERE WERE in 1929 only two year-round settlements of outsiders which were significant to the Tiwi. One was Bathurst Island Mission, by then nearly twenty years old, the only permanent white-man establishment on the islands. It acted as the main exit point for travel to Darwin, the other focus of Tiwi life. There was also the large camp of Mandiimbula and Yeimpi on the south coast of Melville Island, which owed its existence to the sexual arrangement between the Tiwi and Japanese pearlers. 648
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In the 1930's, the centers of Tiwi activity shifted somewhat. The Australian government successfully broke up the camp located on the south coast by transporting nearly all of the Yeimpi to Darwin and by sending patrol boats out to discourage the Japanese from frequenting the area. In about 1933, the Japanese moved their base for contact with the Tiwi north to the region of Garden Point, at the northern end of Apsley Strait, just beyond the ruins of old Fort Dundas. Around the great fresh-water pool on the beach at that locality there developed a Tiwi camp like that which formerly had existed on the south coast; however, the native bands involved were no longer the Yeimpi and Mandiimbula but the Malauila, Munupula, Wilrangwila, and Turupula of northern Bathurst and Melville islands. The government again attempted to control sexual activities between Tiwi and Japanese, but to get to this spot a patrol boat from Darwin had to travel along forty miles of indented coastline which amplified and seemed to project every throb of an engine toward the ears of the Japanese miles away. The patrol boats found that they could not sneak up on the pearlers unannounced and, therefore, could not catch them in the act of cohabiting with native women. [361]

By the late 1930's, pressure from missionary and other humanitarian circles in the southern part of Australia forced the government to attempt to terminate, or at least to control, the trade pattern which had become estab-

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x 532 *Mudungkale* totemic group. On the reverse side (Fig. 79), the zig-zag line *a*, is the road between Snake Bay (upper end, *b*), and Cockle Point, in Apsley Straits (lower end, *c*). At *d*, *d*, is a request for two six-pound bags of sugar; *e*, for tea; *f*, sufficient printed calico for a loin cloth; *g*, three sticks of tobacco; *h*, a tin of tobacco; *j*, a pair of trousers; *k*, a pocket knife, and *m*, a pipe. The crossed lines at *n* indicate the camp of *Tjamalumpua*, the sender of the message stick.

Buchanan Island

The message stick (Fig. 70) refers to the Jaulama jungle, about a half a mile south of our camp.

This stick was sent by the chief mourner of the Melville Island *pukamuni* group to the members of the ironwood, *Mudungkale*, totemic group of Buchanan Island, and adjacent Bathurst Islanders, notifying them of the oncoming burial rituals. The designs on the stick, however, have no relationship to either the ironwood tree group or the message they would receive. The short vertical lines at *c*, *c*, are living paper-bark trees, and the transverse lines, *a*, *a*, dead paper-bark trees in the Jaulama jungle. At *b*, are the roots of the trees, and at panels *c*, the vines of the edible *roko* yams on the branches of the paper-barks. The four panels, *d*, *d*, etc., are jungle trees, and *e* indicates their roots.

Invitation to Adjoining Tribes

[574] Fig. 60, H, illustrates a message stick (not associated with a *pukamuni* ceremony) from the Melville Island people, inviting the aborigines on the Coburg Peninsula to pay them a visit and to perform some of their mainland ceremonies.⁴⁷

On the obverse side, Fig. 60, the parallel lines, *a*, *a*, symbolize the shores of the Coburg Peninsula, and the zig-zag line, *b*, a mangrove creek in the same locality.

On the reverse side, 6H, the V-shaped patterns, *a*, indicate the men who have been invited from the Coburg Peninsula, and those in the lower section, *b*, the women. The short transverse lines at *c*, represent the Melville Island men who will act as hosts to the visitors.

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439 Fig. 58 is a secular message stick sent to an aboriginal, *Marawani*, who was on a visit to Darwin, asking him to bring back the following goods; *a*,

⁴⁷ This message stick suggests that, at the present time, members of the mainland tribes and those of the Tiwi, occasionally visit each other.

THE PUKAMUNI CEREMONY

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tobacco, *b*, matches, *c*, a pipe, *d*, a calico loin cloth, *e*, a pair of short trousers, *f*, a shirt, *g*, sugar, *h*, tea, and *j*, flour.

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Secular

Fig. 60 is a carved stick whose designs were thought out by the artist as he walked along the sandy beach near our camp. Although not a message stick, the illustration is included in the section as an example of how an aboriginal expresses his mental images through the medium of simple wood carving.

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The horizontal lines, *a*, *a*, symbolize the waves breaking on the beach, and the groups of short lines, a pattern of shallow gutters which had been formed on the sandy shore by the fresh water seeping from a nearby lagoon.

10. THE BURIAL POLES

The painted and decorated poles of Melville and Bathurst Islands attracted the attention of all the early visitors. Sir Gordon Bremer in 1824, possibly the first European to see the *pukamuni* poles, when writing about a grave he saw on Melville Island, states: "The situation was one of such perfect retirement and repose that it displayed considerable feeling in the survivors who placed it there and the simple order which pervaded the spot would not have disgraced a civilised people. It was an oblong square open at the foot, the remaining end and sides being railed around with trees, 7 feet to 8 feet high, some of which were carved with stone or shell and further ornamented by rings of wood. On the tops of these were placed the waddies (throwing sticks) of the deceased. The grave was raised above the level of the earth, but the raised part was not more than 3 feet long. At the head was placed a piece of a canoe (probably a bark basket) and a spear and round the grave were several little baskets made of the fan-palm leaf, which, from their small size, we thought had been placed there by the children of the departed. Nothing could exceed the neatness of the whole; the sand and earth were cleared away from the sides and not a shrub or weed was suffered to grow within the area."⁹⁸

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I have quoted Sir Gordon Bremer's description in full because it shows that, even after a hundred and thirty years, the aborigines of Melville Island,

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⁹⁸ Bremer, 1823. From this description it would appear that Bremer chanced to see a grave not long after the aborigines had completed the final rituals. Had any time elapsed the whole area would have been covered with grass and leaves, for, after the *pukamuni* ceremonies, nobody is interested in either the grave or the poles.

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The Sons of Turimpi

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were words like "insecure" and "uneasy." He was not particularly aggressive nor particularly submissive, but he fluctuated between the two attitudes. One got the impression after associating with him that he was never sure of what was expected of him and acted therefore in contradictory ways according to what *he thought* was expected of him. Or to put the same impression another way, there seemed a constant discrepancy between what people expected of Antonio and what he wanted to do if left alone. In tribal fights, for instance, he acted fiercely and aggressively and with the air of swaggering braggadocio that that all important men are expected to show in fighting, yet at the earliest possible moment he melted into the crowd with visible relief at being able to quit the center of the stage and without a trace of rancor or ill will toward any of the people whom he had been abusing or had been abused by a few minutes before. In council meetings of senior men he was always listened to with respect yet always had to be prodded into speaking at all. He never initiated a policy or offered his opinion until pressure was put upon him to state what he thought, and while his opinion when given was listened to with attention it was always a paraphrase of some opinion already given, usually the majority opinion of the group. He expressed what he thought the group wanted him to say, never an "opinion of his own." In this respect Antonio had many of the characteristics of a "yes-man" and like his counterparts in more civilized societies he seldom took the unpopular side and seldom stood up to opposition.

Two burning political issues agitating the Tiwi in 1928-30 were the issues of (1) plural marriage and (2) the visits of the Japanese pearling luggers. The Catholic missionaries had taken a strong stand on plural marriages and were bringing all the economic and moral pressure they could exert on the younger Tiwi to induce them to restrict themselves to one wife. Failure to bow to Mission pressure resulted in the recalcitrant's being cut off from the European food, tobacco, clothes, etc. which could only be obtained through the Mission. But beginning in the middle 1920's Japanese pearling boats in ever increasing numbers had carried on the practice of anchoring on the further side of Melville Island during the period of high tide (when diving for pearl shell was impossible) and inviting the natives to provide their women as prostitutes for the use of the crews during their stay on the beaches. The Japanese captains paid lavishly in European goods for any women thus provided and the subtribes on the southeast side of Melville, in particular the subtribe called the Yeimpi, proved very susceptible to the Japanese temptations.

These two issues of plural marriage and prostitution for the Japanese rather neatly complemented each other at two points. Not only did the Japanese rival the Mission station as a source of supply for European goods; the possession of a large number of wives was a condition that made a man very unpopular with the missionaries, but, if he were disposed to rent out some of them, made the same man very popular with the Japanese. The plural marriage issue, if alone, would clearly have divided the tribe into the conservatives, staunchly upholding plural marriage as the Tiwi way, and the radicals abandoning it in return for Mission favor. But such an alignment was cut right across

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881 while a small trestle had been built of three
 [343] upright sticks about 2 ft. 6 in. high in the
 form of an isosceles triangle, with the apex
 to the west. Cross sticks were laid across
 the top of this and the sticks covered with
 grass. Three old men then took Cooper to
 a point about twenty yards east of the
 trestle and faced towards it, two on his
 right, one on his left. They each held a
 [411] flat bladed club, *irryalla*, in the left hand
 horizontally above the head and beat the
 [533] point of it with a light round club with a
 pointed end, *markunga*. Cooper held three
markunga in the crook of his left arm, one
 being taken and used by one of the old men.
 The old men advanced towards the trestle,
 chanting and beating their clubs in the way
 described. Cooper was slightly behind them.
 Young men followed the group. Cooper
 stood before the trestle as at an altar while
 the old men chanted for about five minutes.
 Water was called for, and brought by a
 woman and given to a visitor from the
 Mugula tribe. He then poured the water
 over Cooper's head. Cooper rubbed his
 belly with his *markunga*. The visitor then
 pulled the hair string free from one end of
 the wooden collar, *eladini*, while Cooper
 made very wry faces. The collar was
 removed and the ceremony ended. I was
 [439] presented with Cooper's *eladini* and *markunga*
 in return for gifts, and I was cheerfully
 escorted back to the beach where the lugger
 was waiting for me.

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under the surface by the massive roots of the paperbarks. It was in just this sort of pool that the largest of the five crocs landed that night, was harpooned. The huge 18-foot animal dived into the roots and it took about twenty tense minutes to dislodge and dispatch him. Aside from the crocodiles the only wild life seen that night was a small and very frightened little mouse who suddenly appeared on my lap and then just as suddenly disappeared over the boat's side. [123] [225]

We returned to Minianapi at daybreak and the hot tea and roast goose seemed a perfect breakfast, or was it supper? It didn't matter for we were soon sound asleep.

When we finally awoke in mid-afternoon we found the camp almost deserted. "Everyone go walkabout; kill geese," Albert informed us as he and Agnes gathered more wood to build up the smouldering fire. It was very quiet in the small clearing and only the little black spots of charcoal spaced in irregular intervals on the ground were evidence that there were more than our mob in residence. The clearing itself was quite bare because it had been burned by the first comers, with the double purpose of clearing out the four-foot grass itself, and any of the various poisonous snakes which were quite likely to infest it. In back of the clearing was a thick tangle of low bushes through which ran a little foot-path. Agnes started down this path carrying a billy can and I offered to go with her, but Albert said, "No, by um by we go, him long way, him only get a little bit now." After one gets used to the pronoun "him" being used to refer to everything animal, vegetable, and mineral, this phrase is perfectly understandable: the first "him" referred to the water, the second to Agnes. [36] [195]

So instead of collecting water, I wandered down to the river bank where Billy-Two, Brownie, and a few of the other men, were busy skinning the crocodiles. This they did by cutting the skin first around the head, then down either side of the rows of bumps running along the spine to the tail. The skin was then carefully peeled and cut from the body. Once free it was rubbed with salt which would act as a preservative until such time as the supply boat would arrive to carry it to Darwin. There the skins would be sold to the dealer and the proceeds credited to the hunter's account or sent in the form of hard cash to the settlement for distribution. Now they were folded into bundles and loaded into the launch, and large [281] [439] [452] [262]

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telephone, with which they keep in touch with the Presbytery in Darwin, not only were the good fathers there to greet us, but the children of the mission school had also been given a holiday to celebrate the occasion. Small boys and half-grown lads were there in force and soon crowded round the 'plane. The bearded men against the fence kept in the background, while women and girls peered over the stile that leads into the garden. Men and boys wore only the little naga, women and girls a short sarong—and they are all the better for this lack of clothing.

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KINDLY and shrewd old Father Gaell, who founded the mission rather more than a quarter of a century ago, has his own ideas with regard to the black man. He does not ruin his health by dressing him (or her) up in mission clothing, and he sees that the blacks who come into the mission do not become mere spongers and hangers-on. When a black asks for flour or anything else that he requires, Father Gaell replies, "What have you to give for it?" He may have a spear, for which the good father has no use, but he will take it, or anything that the black can offer in payment. If the black's reply is "Nothing," Father Gaell will say "Well, you are a big, strong man; you can dig the garden."

It does not matter that the garden has been dug before. The thing is to keep the blacks from becoming cadgers. Treated so, they retain their self-respect and do not degenerate into useless loafers hanging round the mission station, just for what they can get without any effort. The mission fathers, of course, do all they can for the sick and injured—that is an entirely different matter. Every missionary who has been long on any field in North Australia must recognize that it is impossible to do anything with a full-grown black to alter his outlook in any way, and the methods of the Sacred Heart Mission must appeal to all unbiased members of any church as admirable common-sense.

It is only with the very young that the missionaries can hope for any success in the inculcating of Christian ideals, and it is towards the little boys and girls that the good fathers look for the reward of their self-sacrificing labours. They are able to get them, too, without pandering to the laziness of their parents. The natives, who are always fond of children, are quite willing to have their little boys well fed and well looked after; but, when it comes to the girls, self-interest enters into the question. Little girls can be sold to the Japanese of the pearling fleets, and the Japanese are liberal in the matter of prices.

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FATHER Gaell must therefore buy the girls in competition with the Japanese. It has been said that this is countenancing a shameful and revolting slave-trade, and that to buy the girls is definitely wrong in principle. What would the worthy critics do? Are they content to see this dreadful traffic continued, or have they any practical alternative to offer? Father Gaell is trying at least to save as many girls as possible from the horrible fate in store for them. The regular patrol of North Australian waters by the forces of the Government may eventually put an end to the practice, but what of all these little girls in the meantime? As they grow up, the Christian boys and girls marry one another, and, as the Christians have one wife only, they are unwilling to sell or to hire her out to the Japanese. This, like all the dealings of the Sacred Heart Mission with the islanders, is based on practical common sense.

[p. 14(B)]